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ARTICLES:

(6) Prime Minister Aso, U.S. President Obama talk by phone, agree to early meeting

ASAHI (Page 1) (Full)  
Eve., January 29, 2009

Prime Minister Aso this morning held a telephone conversation with U.S. President Obama for approximately 10 minutes. The Prime Minister proposed an early meeting with the President, to which Obama agreed. The timing of the meeting will now be boiled down. The two leaders confirmed to closely cooperate on such issues as the financial and economic crisis, and the North Korea problem. They also agreed to further strengthen the bilateral alliance.

The telephone conversation was carried out in English without an

interpreter. According to the Foreign Ministry, the Prime Minister told the President, "Let's meet soon," adding, "I would like Japan and the United States as the world's top two economic powers to closely cooperate." He stressed his view of the two countries banding together to deal with the financial crisis. Obama expressed his approval.

President Obama expressed his appreciation for Japan's contributions to the war on terror in Afghanistan and other countries, saying, "I would like to thank Japan for its contributions thus far." The two also confirmed close cooperation on climate change and environmental issues, as well as on the North Korean missile, nuclear, and abduction issues.

According to an informed source, the Prime Minister reportedly transmitted his strong desire for an early meeting with the President before he expressed his congratulations for the inauguration. President Obama, during his telephone conversation with the Prime Minister last November, said, "I would like to build a personal relationship of trust." The Prime Minister, too, seems to have expressed his desire to strengthen ties with Obama.

Since his inauguration, President Obama has made telephone calls to approximate 10 heads of state, including countries in the Middle East.

(7) Consul General to Okinawa Maher to become Japan Desk director at the U.S. State Department; Greene to be his successor

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 2) (Excerpt)

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Eve., January 29, 2009

It was learned today that the U.S. Department of State is internally coordinating the appointment of Consul General Kevin Maher of the U.S. Consulate General in Okinawa as Japan Desk director at the Department. The outlook is that once the procedures inside the Department are over, the appointment of Maher will be officially decided around the end of February. However, Maher avoided a clear statement, only saying, "As far as I know, nothing has been decided." Maher's tour of duty in his current post is for three years, having started in July 2006. Once the new appointment is set, he would apparently be going to Washington this July. It has been unofficially decided that his successor as consul general will be Raymond Greene, the unit chief for bilateral security policy at the American Embassy in Japan.

A relevant authority at the U.S. Embassy commented: "Greene, like Maher, has thorough knowledge about the issue of the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. There will be no change in the U.S. stance toward U.S. force realignment."

Maher served previously as the security unit chief at the American Embassy and was responsible for the negotiations between Japan and the United States on the U.S. force realignment.

(8) Government launches MSDF dispatch plan before obtaining consent from all persons concerned

ASAHI (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
January 29, 2009

The Defense Ministry ordered the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) to prepare for dispatching its vessels to the pirate-infested waters off Somalia under a provision for maritime policing action one month after Prime Minister Aso gave an instruction to discuss the issue. But some officials are critical of using the policing provision, which assumes coastal guarding. Using this provision stretches the interpretation of the Self-Defense Forces Law. Given this, the government and the ruling camp are eager to enact new legislation quickly, but it seems difficult to complete Diet deliberations on the issue before MSDF vessels are dispatched.

Aso takes lead in persuading defense minister

Speaking before reporters last night, Prime Minister Aso emphasized the need to hurriedly prepare anti-piracy measures, saying: "The number (of Japan-related ships that pass through the area) is estimated to be five to six a day. Under this situation, Japanese ships could be attacked by pirates any time."

Aso himself took the lead in promoting the MSDF dispatch plan. In response to a request by Ocean Policy Research Foundation Chairman Masahiro Akiyama (former administrative vice defense minister), a former classmate of Aso at Gakushuin University, and others, Aso instructed government officials on Dec. 26 to consider a dispatch of MSDF vessels to Somalia. Saying that he could not wait for new legislation to be enacted in the divided Diet, Aso began to move to take action under the policing clause.

When not only the Group of Eight (G-8) countries but also China and South Korea have decided to participate in international anti-piracy effort, Japan cannot remain just an idle spectator forever. The

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government also fears that if Japanese private citizens were attacked by pirates, politicians would be criticized for a lack of measures. These factors are behind its decision to take action under the existing law.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura, advisor to the prime minister, persuaded Hamada to change his cautious stance. Kawamura called Hamada to the Prime Minister's Office on Jan. 14 and told him: "The Cabinet Office will offer support. We will not put the responsibility only on the defense minister." The New Komeito, though it remains cautious about dispatching SDF troops overseas, did not apply the brakes, either, with a senior member saying: "We cannot cause trouble for the prime minister."

The MSDF intends to mobilize two escort ships carrying patrol helicopters immediately after an order for maritime policing action is issued. Assuming such cases as an on-board inspection and disarmament, members of the MSDF's Special Boarding Unit will aboard. The government is also considering dispatching P-3C patrol planes.

The Defense Ministry, however, still takes the view that a dispatch of the MSDF under new legislation is rational. It is beyond expectation for the ministry to dispatching naval ships to waters far from Japan, like waters off Somalia, under the policing provision, because the provision assumes patrols in Japanese territorial waters. Under the clause, MSDF troops are required to provide protection only to ships with Japanese registry or carrying Japanese and are not allowed to protect foreign ships. Further, SDF troops are not allowed to use weapons unless it is for legitimate self-defense or averting imminent danger.

Even after he instructed the MSDF chief of staff and others yesterday to start preparations, Hamada emphasized that the planned dispatch under the policing clause is a stopgap measures to the last. He said: "The ministry would issue an order for maritime policing action as a makeshift measure until new legislation is prepared."

Even if the government submits new legislation to the Diet in early March as scheduled, though, it will be unknown when the law is enacted. In actuality, if the Democratic Party of Japan stands against it, it may become difficult to enact the law during the current Diet session.

Weapon-use standards focused on in discussion

In response to the order for maritime policing action issued by the defense minister, the government and the ruling camp will shortly start full-scale deliberations on new legislation, aiming to enact the law in early March.

"The focus of discussion is on to what extent troops will be allowed to use weapons in exercising police authority," Chairman Shigeki Sato of the ruling camp's project team on anti-piracy measures said to reporters after its meeting yesterday. He indicated the focus of

discussion is on easing the nation's weapon-use standard.

One of the agenda presented yesterday for consideration in the future is "how to use weapons practically and effectively against heavily armed pirates." This reflects concerns growing in the Defense Ministry about a high possibility that SDF troops would

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injure or kill foreigners overseas for the first time, as said by a senior ministry official,.

Whenever it enacted a special law to dispatch SDF troops overseas, the government eased the weapon-use standard. Under the PKO Law in 1992, the government allowed SDF members to use weapons in order to protect themselves or other SDF members as a natural right. Under the law related to the new defense guidelines in 1999, the SDF was allowed to use weapons to protect Japanese nationals in transit for rescue.

Under the 2001 antiterrorism special measures law, the government approved the use of weapons to protect arms and equipment, in addition to camps and translators. This rule was also applied in the Iraq special measures law.

The government, though, designates the MSDF's planned anti-piracy mission as a policing action. A senior Defense Ministry official explained: "The use of weapons under the exercise of police authority does not go against Article 9 of the Constitution." He meant that although Article 9 prohibits the use of weapons with the aim of settling international disputes, the use of weapons against pirates, who are just criminals and do not represent a state or a state-like entity, does not fall under the use of weapons as prohibited in Article 9.

The government and the ruling bloc will therefore study whether to approve the use of arms for other cases than self-defense and avoiding imminent danger in order to "perform duty." They will look into the possibility of allowing MSDF troops to fire at the hull in the event that a pirate ship approaching a commercial freighter ignores their order to stop. Questions are likely to be posed on the propriety of allowing the heavily armed SDF to use weapons to this extent.

The Iraq special law banned the SDF from going to rescue other military countries' troops under attack by terrorists, based on the judgment that "this action could fall under the use of armed forces prohibited by Article 9," according to the Cabinet Legislation Bureau. Whether to allow this action is another agenda item.

In its meeting yesterday, the project team confirmed the policy of providing protection to foreign ships unrelated to Japan under new legislation. If approval is given to rescuing foreign troops under attack, it will become possible for the MSDF to engage in patrol and policing actions, in addition to escorting fleets of commercial vessels.

(9) Tanto-chokugen (straightforward advice) column: Reach settlement on right of collective self defense

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)  
January 29, 2009

Shotaro Yachi, government representative

I would like Prime Minister Aso to exercise strategic diplomacy. The pressing issue for Aso diplomacy is how to address the global recession. To this end, it is necessary for the U.S. -- where the global recession started -- China -- the largest holder of U.S. government bonds and a fast-growing country -- and Japan -- the second largest economic power in the world -- to exchange views on

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how to climb out of the recession. Mini-lateral diplomacy among Japan, the U.S. and China, as well as bilateral and multilateral

diplomacy, should be pursued in a strategic manner.

Japan-U.S. alliance to remain unshakable

The Obama administration was inaugurated in the U.S. However, there will be no major change (reform) as is widely alleged.

Many observers said that the Bush administration advocated unilateralism. However, it also attached importance to relations with Britain, Japan, and Australia.

President Obama has advocated the revival of U.S. leadership through international cooperation ever since he started his election campaign. In the meantime, as a Senator, he once made a speech in the Congress on the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance. The Japan-U.S. alliance will never falter. Both countries will pursue a realistic policy line, instead of taking a fundamentalist approach.

The U.S. government will not press Japan to come up with a specific numerical goal to eliminate the bilateral trade deficit, as it did during the Clinton era. Even if it increasingly attaches importance to China, a situation in which "Japan passing" returns is unlikely to occur. The U.S.' attaching importance to China and strengthening its ties with Japan are compatible.

However, Washington is increasingly becoming impatient over the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, including the relocation of Futenma Air Station. It will continue to press Japan to fulfill the agreement. There is a possibility of the U.S. making more requests to Japan regarding the war on terror. Before the U.S. does so, Japan should come up with measures to contribute to Afghanistan, based on information obtained locally.

There is also the issue of the right of collective self-defense. The government has received a report from the Council on the Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security. The report calls for change in constitutional interpretation so that the right of collective self-defense can be exercised. If the situation arises in which a U.S. vessel came under attack while a Maritime Self Defense Force warship was close by, and the MSDF ship did nothing to protect the U.S. vessel, the bilateral alliance would be severely undermined.

The government must determine how to deal with problems presented in the report.

Equilateral-triangular relationship unrealistic

Japan's relations with China have taken a favorable turn since the mutually beneficial strategic relationship taken by the Abe administration. However, there still are pending issues, such as undesirable moves around the Senkakus, the development of gas fields in the East China Sea, and the frozen gyoza dumpling incident. National defense spending and defense policy have yet to be made more transparent. It is imperative to build a framework for stable talks on various levels.

In Japan, some insist that Japan, the U.S., and China should have an equilateral-triangular relationship. However, the state of affairs in China differs that of Japan or the U.S. The Japan-U.S. alliance,

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which has been firmly maintained during the post-war decades, is based not only on such shared values as freedom, human rights and the rule of law but also on shared interests in wide areas, such as politics, the economy and culture. It is impossible to discuss U.S. relations with Japan on the same level as its relations with China. Forming an "equilateral-triangular relationship" among Japan, the U.S. and China is unrealistic and undesirable.

Concerning the North Korea issue, the Obama administration needs to have a solid stance in facilitating dialogue with that nation, a policy approach it advocates. However, North Korea is a shrewd negotiating partner. It is essential for the Obama administration to hold close talks with Japan, using a "smart power" approach, in realizing pending issues which the previous Clinton and Bush

administrations have failed to achieve.

Relations between Tokyo and Pyongyang improved with Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to North Korea on September 17, 2002, as the occasion. However, Japan has yet to realize its minimum goal of the North returning all abductees and their families.

The nuclear issue is very important from the perspective of maintaining security. However, in order to normalize ties with North Korea, it is indispensable to settle not only the nuclear issue but also the abduction issue. A vague settlement of the abduction issue is unforgivable. Japan must continue to put pressure on that nation.

ZUMWALT